The Genre of Lyric Poetry

A dominant genre of poetry emerging during the 19th century took the form of Lyric Poetry, deriving from the Victorian conventions of narrative and dramatic poetry. A lyric poem distinguishes itself from its corresponding genres in numerous ways, most noticeably noted in form, content and purpose……Introduction to be added…..

The term lyric was taken from the greek word “lyre”, referring to the musical instrument with similarities to the guitar. Greek lyric poetry was divided into two basic kinds: the choral lyric (sung by a choir) and the monody(site). Both of these modes are written in a variety of metres, for example the Elegy (site). Most lyric poetry depends on a regular meter which is based on either a number of syllables or the stress on words. The most common meters are Iambic, Trochaic, and Anapestic. The iambic meter is recognized as having “two syllables with the short or unstressed syllable followed by the long or stressed syllable” (site). The trochaic meter is also made of two syllables, differing from iambic in that is has a “long or stressed syllable followed by the short or unstressed poetry (site). This metre is specifically for lyric poetry, and does not occur in any other genre. The Anapestic meter is of three syllables featuring two short and unstressed and one long and stressed. In greek terms, the lyric was a song to be sung accompanied by a musical instrument. Therefore, in its modern day poetic form lyric poetry has a certain “lyrical” or “musical” tone to it, and the accompanying meter amplifys the genres musical tendencies. A lyric piece is a short poem, and may or may not be set to music. Styles of lyric poetry are elegies, odes and sonnets. The sonnet is arguably the most popular form of lyric poetry, in its petrarchan or Shakespearean arrangement.

In Europe, the lyric established itself as a prominent literary mode of the 19th century. Lyric poetry was now classified by its content. To the romantic poets, within a lyric poem the narrator, typically delivering in the first person, gives expression to a feeling, state of mind or emotion that is presently being experienced. As a subject, a lyric poem general contains certain specific attributes, such as imagination, subjectivity and emotion (site). The lyric is generally expressed through a first person narrative, yet the “I” in the poem need not be the poet who wrote it (site). Throughout the piece the narrator is attempting to bring the emotion from the abstract world into a physical representation, through the use of metaphor, association, description, etc. William Wordsworth was one of the most influential writers of the genre, generally responsible for its popularity and the revival of the traditional sonnet. To Wordsworth, all good poetry derives from a spontaneous overflow of emotion, experienced in the past, and recollected in tranquility (of the present), categorizing lyric poetry as the “poetry of sensation”. Wordsworth’s poem “The solitary reaper” published in 1807 is considered to be an idealic form of lyric poetry. The poem is not only written in lyric form, but is also internally addressing what a lyric should be. In the poem, the idea of what a lyric should encompass is represented as a “highland lass: singing in Gaelic. Although the listener does not understand her words, he is infatuated by the sound, stating her voice out does the nightingale (a lyrical symbol). The inability to comprehend the words of the galeic woman are not a problem as the narrator is internalizing the sound, bearing the music inside him as he relays the poem. To Wordsworth and many other poets, this poem set the basic template to what a lyric poem should resemble. The philosopher Mills in his 1833 essay “what is poetry” suggests that ideal poetry is a “wordsworthian lyric” which is the “most perfect poetry of all” in its ability to be spontaneous, subjective and relay a sense of believability. According to Mills, after experiencing a mental breakdown claimed he was able to remember how to feel again through reading Wordsworth’s emotionally charged poetry.

Entering the Victorian era, the emerging Victorian poets found the this genre of writing complex and difficult to authentically express.and understand, when in reality it was meant to be a simple, short and easily absorbable genre. To the Victorians, they believed the abilty to express an authentic, original voice of a subjective feeling has now been displaced and confused. This lyrical confusion was thought to be caused by the detachment the Victorian poets felt to their generation; viewing their era as an ugly emergence of modernity, a time where factory building and industrialization took a forefront and the idyllic nature of the landscape was forgotten. In a sense these poets were correct, their era could not sustain the lyric form of authentic voice. The invention of the printing press during the period added to the lack of authenticity, for although preserving the lyric forms, resulted in a loss of its earlier oral circulation. Therefore, the poets began to idealize the writers of the romantic period, idolizing them for their ability to reach the authenticity of an idyllic lyrical voice and used the works of poets such as Wordsworth as templates of inspiration. Unable to fully encompass the originality of the lyric, Victorians often mixed up their genres, so the lyric became incorporated with other forms such as the dramatic monologue or “dramatic lyric”. Tennyson’s “the lady of shallot” is one of the most well-known poems from the Victorian era, and incorporates numerous poetic forms, The poem is overall aesthetically pleasing and contains a melodic rhythm that situates the poem in lyrical format. However, the poem does not contend with a single moment of expression, dismisses the use of the narrative “I” and is comprised a longer set of text containing a narrative story line. The peom gathers a sense of the dramatic once movement begins, a very uncommon occurrence in lyric poetry.Therefore, the “Lady of Shalott” contains a collection of poetic forms; the lyrical ballad and a form of the dramatic monologue.

Conclusion to be added

Works Cited

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